DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 923 CG 025 295

TITLE	Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Breaking the Silence in Schools and in Families. Education Report.
INSTITUTION	Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, Boston.
REPORT NO	Pub-17296-60-500-2/93-CR
PUB DATE	25 Feb 93
NOTE	62p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, State House, Room 111, Boston, MA 02133.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Affirmative Action; *Blue Ribbon Commissions; Crime Prevention; *Curriculum Development; Dropout Prevention; *Educational Environment; Family Life; Guidelines; High Schools; *High School Students; *Homosexuality; Lesbianism; School Policy; *School Safety; School Surveys; Student Attitudes; Suicide; Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Massachusetts

ABSTRACT

The Massachusetts Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth prepared its first annual report on various issues of concern to homosexual youth. The Commission seeks to work on prevention of youth suicide, violence prevention, and prevention of problems faced by young homosexuals in schools and the family. The Commission sought information from a series of five public hearings across the state in the fall of 1992. National studies and professional articles were also consulted as well as surveys of local high school students' attitudes about gay and lesbian youth issues. Problems facing this group include harassment in school, isolation and suicide, dropping out and poor school performance, lack of adult role models, and lack of understanding in their families. Exploration of these problems led to the following series of recommendations to make Massachusetts school environments safe for gay and lesbian students: (1) implement school policies protecting gay and lesbian from discrimination; (2) train teachers, counselors, and school staff in crisis intervention and violence prevention; (3) establish school-based support groups from gay and straight students; (4) provide information in school libraries for gay and lesbian adolescents; and (5) develop curricula that include gay and lesbian issues. Appendixes contain survey results and the executive order creating the Commission. Includes a 33-item bibliography. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 367 923

MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

BREAKING THE SILENCE IN SCHOOLS AND IN FAMILIES

EDUCATION REPORT

THE GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

February 25, 1993

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. LeFontaine
Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

State House, Room 111, Boston, MA 02133
617-828-3039

CG025295

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MARCH 18, 1993

NOTE TO READERS OF "MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH":

This report was originally released to the public on February 25, 1993 by the members of the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth.

Governor William Weld endorsed the report and its recommendations on February 27.

Since then, Secretary of Education **Piedad Robertson** and **Michael Duffy,** Chair of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination have also endorsed the recommendations in the report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 1

Introduction 4

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEMS

I. Harassment of Gay and Lesbian Students in School 8

II. Isolation and Suicide 12

III. Drop-Out and Poor School Performance 17

IV. Gay and Lesbian Youth and Their Need for Adult Role Models 20

V. Families of Gay and Lesbian Youth 24

RECOMMENDATIONS

*** Summary of Recommendations for Schools 29**

Explanation of Recommendations for Schools 31

*** Summary of Recommendations for Families of Gay and Lesbian Youth 38**

Explanation of Recommendations for Families of Gay and Lesbian Youth 39

Recommendations to State Agencies and to the Massachusetts Legislature 41

Appendix A — Survey of High School Students 46

Appendix B — Survey of Community Groups and School Gay/Straight Alliances 50

Appendix C — Executive Order 53

Bibliography 55

Publication No. 17296-60-500-2/93-C.R.
Approved by: Philmore Anderson III, State Purchasing Agent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FORMATION AND MANDATE OF NATION'S FIRST GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH COMMISSION

Governor William F. Weld signed an executive order on February 10th, 1992 creating the nation's first **Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth.** Governor Weld and **Lieutenant Governor Paul Cellucci** formed the Commission in response to the epidemic of suicide by young gays and lesbians as revealed in a 1989 Federal report on youth suicide.

The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth is the first commission of its kind in the United States.

Prevention of gay and lesbian youth suicide, violence prevention, as well as prevention of problems faced by young gays and lesbians in school and in the family are central to the Commission's mandate. The Commission is empowered to make recommendations to the Governor, to state agencies, and to private agencies about the creation of programs and policies which will help gay and lesbian youth in Massachusetts. Abolishing prejudice and discrimination against gay and lesbian youth is a stated goal of the Commission as expressed by Governor Weld in the preamble to the executive order.

The Commission exists on an ongoing basis as an all-volunteer advocacy group, serving under the auspices of the Weld/Cellucci administration. The Commission is charged with making an annual report to Governor Weld.

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS FACED BY GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH IN SCHOOL

This first report of the Commission is its **Education Report,** entitled "Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth." In this report, the Commission addresses the problems faced by gay and lesbian adolescents in schools. To gather information for its report, the Commission held a series of five public hearings across Massachusetts in the autumn of 1992. The hearings were held in Amherst on November 13, Worcester on November 16, the Massachusetts State House on November 17 and November 18, and finally in Springfield on December 1. The hearings were open to the general public and to the media.

The Education Report of the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth focuses on the testimony delivered by gay and lesbian teenagers as compelling evidence for the need for change in Massachusetts schools. This testimony forms the heart of this report. National studies and professional articles are also cited, as

well as surveys of local high school students' attitudes about gay and lesbian youth issues.

The first half of the report discusses the problems encountered by gay and lesbian students in school as well as the problems of their family members. The report outlines these problems in the following five sections:

1. "Harassment of Gay and Lesbian Students in School"
2. "Isolation and Suicide"
3. "Drop-Out and Poor School Performance"
4. "Gay and Lesbian Youth and Their Need for Adult Role Models"
5. "Families of Gay and Lesbian Youth"

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOLS

In the second half of the report, the Commission makes a series of recommendations directly to schools about how to make Massachusetts school environments safe for gay and lesbian students and how to help these young people realize their educational potential. The Commission urges Governor Weld, the Department of Education and the Executive Office of Education to endorse these recommendations and to devise a plan for their implementation throughout the Commonwealth.

Five specific recommendations to schools are in the following areas:

1. School policies protecting gay and lesbian students from harassment, violence, and discrimination.
2. Training teachers, counselors, and school staff in crisis intervention and violence prevention.
3. School-based support groups for gay and straight students.
4. Information in school libraries for gay and lesbian adolescents.
5. Curriculum which includes gay and lesbian issues.

The Commission makes three recommendations for helping families of gay and lesbian youth:

1. Peer counselling in the P-FLAG(Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) model and family counselling in school.
2. Education of families through information in public libraries.
3. Parent speakers bureaus to advocate for fair treatment of gay and lesbian youth in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE AGENCIES AND THE LEGISLATURE

To facilitate both implementation of its recommendations in local schools and to educate teachers, school personnel, families and students about the problems of gay and lesbian teenagers, the Commission makes recommendations to three state agencies : the **Department of Education,** the **Executive Office of Education,** and the **Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD).** The Commission also endorses legislation for the **Massachusetts Legislature** to enact.

The Commission's three recommendations to the Department of Education are:

1. Sponsor training for teachers, families and students to learn about the problems of gay and lesbian youth.
2. Make presentations to school committee associations concerning the problems faced by gay and lesbian youth.
3. Develop and disseminate a yellow pages resource book about gay and lesbian youth, one version each for students, teachers, and families.

The Commission's three recommendations to the Executive Office of Education focus on policies and research:

1. Develop and promote anti-harassment policies and guidelines for protecting gay and lesbian students in schools across the Commonwealth.
2. Develop school policies that will guarantee gay and lesbian students equal rights to an education and equal access to school activities.
3. Research the problems of gay and lesbian students, and the needs of teachers and families of gay and lesbian youth.

The state's leading civil rights agency, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), is urged to do the following three things:

1. Conduct outreach to teachers and school personnel to inform them of their rights under the state's Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Law, which was enacted in 1989.
2. Sponsor anti-discrimination awareness programs in schools for all students to learn about the gay and lesbian civil rights law.
3. Sponsor legislation to extend MCAD's jurisdiction to include complaints of education discrimination.

Finally, the **Massachusetts legislature** is urged to enact, and Governor Weld urged to prioritize passage of, legislation protecting gay and lesbian students in public schools against discrimination in admission to schools or access to school activities and courses of study.

INTRODUCTION

"We feel strongly that there is a tremendous need to address the difficult issues facing gay and lesbian youth. Half a million young people attempt suicide every year. Nearly 30% of youth suicides are committed by gays or lesbians....We must abolish the prejudice and isolation faced by gay and lesbian youth. We need to help them stay at home and stay in school so they can have healthy and productive lives."---Governor William Weld, speaking at the swearing-in ceremony for the members of the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth on June 11, 1992.

HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF THE NATION'S FIRST GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth had its origins as a bill that was written by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights in late 1989, immediately following the legislature's passage of the Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Law. The Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights filed legislation to create an advisory board focusing on gay and lesbian youth services. Representative Alvin Thompson(D-Cambridge) was the chief sponsor of the bill.

The legislation was refiled for the 1991 legislative session and came to the attention of the media on May 7, 1991, when Lieutenant Governor Paul Cellucci publicly endorsed the bill on behalf of himself and Governor William Weld. The bill passed the House in December, 1991, but died in the Senate at the close of the session.

Governor Weld at that point offered to create a commission by executive order; the Commission would last throughout his administration. The order was drafted by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights in consultation with the Weld administration. The executive order broadened the mandate of the original legislation considerably.

On February 10, 1992, Governor William F. Weld and Lieutenant Governor Paul Cellucci signed an executive order creating the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. **The Commission is the first of its kind in the United States**. On June 11, 1992, Governor Weld swore in the 27 members of the Commission, including two high school students, two parents of gay and lesbian children, three teachers, and a number of human services professionals. Governor Weld urged the Commission to gather information and hold public hearings and to submit a report to him within a year.

U.S. REPORT ON GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH SUICIDE BRINGS THE ISSUE TO PUBLIC AWARENESS

"Adolescent suicide attempts result from the adolescent feeling that he has been subject to a progressive isolation from meaningful social relationships, because of problems that he/she felt to be 'unshareable.' "---J. Jacobs, (Adolescent Suicide, 1971).

In 1989, the United States Department of Health and Human Services issued a stunning report on youth suicide, with a chapter on gay and lesbian youth suicide. Pressure from anti-gay forces within the Bush/Quayle administration led to suppression, not only of the controversial chapter, but also of the entire report. Only 3000 copies of the report were printed and little or no action was taken to deal with the epidemic of youth suicide, let alone the problems of gay and lesbian adolescents. Statistics in the report revealed that between 1950 and 1980, the suicide rate for youths aged 15 through 24 rose 170% as opposed to only 20% for the total population. This clearly indicated an alarming rise in the suicide rate for all youth.

Even more striking was the fact that gay and lesbian youth accounted for approximately one-third of all youth suicides. Five hundred thousand young people attempt suicide annually; of these, gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. **The report also revealed that suicide is the leading cause of death among gay and lesbian youth.**

COMMISSION MANDATE

Alarmed by the findings of this report, both members of the gay and lesbian community as well as health professionals began to call for greater efforts to meet the needs of gay and lesbian youth. Governor William Weld expressed his support for this intiative through the creation of the Commission and in a personal appearance at the swearing-in of Commission members. At this event, Governor Weld urged the Commission to make curbing the high rate of suicide among gay and lesbian youth its top priority. "We feel strongly that there is a tremendous need to address the difficult issues facing gay and lesbian youth," said Governor Weld at the ceremony. "Half a million young people attempt suicide every year. Nearly 30% of youth sucides are committed by gays or lesbians. ...We must abolish the prejudice and isolation faced by gay and lesbian youth. We need to help them stay at home and stay in school so they can have healthy and productive lives."

According to the executive order, the Commission has a broad mandate. Preventing suicide and preventing violence against gay and lesbian youth are its priorities, and it is also charged with working to end all forms of discrimination against youth who are gay or lesbian. The Commission reports directly to the Governor, meets regularly with three of his cabinet secretaries, and makes recommendations to both public and private agencies about creation of policies and programs to help gay and lesbian youth.

The Commission is active on an ongoing basis, serving under the Weld/Cellucci administration. In the first six months of its existence, Commission members have launched a statewide campaign to educate the public of Massachusetts about the problems of gay and lesbian youth. Commission members have made a variety of public appearances, speaking to teachers, human service professionals, youth, and family groups, both in person and through the media.

THE COMMISSION'S PUBLIC HEARINGS: A VOICE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

In the fall of 1992, the Commission held a series of five public hearings to gather testimony from gay and lesbian youth, from teachers, from parents of gays and lesbians, and human service professionals. The testimony from these hearings forms the heart of this report. An unprecedented number of gay and lesbian youth spoke out at these hearings, which were widely covered by the mainstream print media, by radio, and television. The result was to put a human face on the suffering of gay and lesbian youth and to bring their personal stories to the attention of Massachusetts citizens.

The hearings were statewide and offered regional diversity. The first hearing was held in Amherst on November 13 and the second was held in Worcester on November 16. The two largest hearings were held at the State House on November 17 and November 18. The final hearing was in Springfield on December 1. A total of 90 people testified at these hearings.

The hearings, in addition to providing the testimony for this report, also crystallized the mission of the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. The Commission is committed to giving an ongoing voice to gay and lesbian youth, a voice in their schools, in their families and communities, and a voice in the media through the young people who have chosen to speak out publicly. The courage, honesty, and pride of these young gays and lesbians continue to broaden public support and understanding for our work.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEMS OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

At the hearings and through our research, the Commission found that gay and lesbian youth face numerous, often unendurable, obstacles growing up gay or lesbian in this society. Gay and lesbian youth exist in a society that in attitude and behavior discriminates against them. Society at large creates a mythology about gays and lesbians, and virtually denies the existence of gay and lesbian youth. Parents, family, peers, and teachers are generally ignorant of what it means to be gay or lesbian. Gay and lesbian youth have little chance of talking with a knowledgeable or understanding person concerning his or her gay or lesbian identity.

Overt hostility, in addition to ignorance and silence, surrounds gay and lesbian youth. Both adults and peers often reject gay and lesbian youths. This often takes the form of physical violence and verbal harassment, leading 28% of gay and lesbian youth to drop out of high school, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The primary effects of society's hostility and lack of acceptance are feelings of isolation, extreme low self-esteem, and consequent attempts at self-destructive behavior.

AN UNSAFE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOL

Inspired by the testimony of these youth, the Commission has chosen to first focus on schools, where the prevailing unsafe climate denies equal educational opportunity to lesbian and gay youth. Virtually every youth who testified before the Commission cited the need for action to change their school environment. Often the first person experiences these youth related were horrifying -- stories of violence, abuse, and harassment, from both peers and adults. Given that state government has a responsibility to guarantee equal opportunity and a safe environment for all the students in the Commonwealth's schools, the Commission has focused its first report around recommendations designed to create an environment where all students might learn, free from fear and intimidation.

"MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH"

This report, entitled "Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth", is the first in a series of reports the Commission will issue. It outlines the problems faced by gay and lesbian youth in school and makes a series of recommendations that seek to guarantee safety and end abuse. Massachusetts Public Schools need to abolish abuse, harassment, and violence against these youth. In addition, schools must provide support through school-based gay/straight student groups, from counselors and teachers, and through information in school libraries.

School, along with family, forms the life of the teenager. It is within the purview of state government to set guidelines, and work to promote school policies and programs on a statewide basis to make schools safe for gay and lesbian youth. This report is the first step in meeting the obligation our government has to guarantee equal educational opportunity and safety for all of its youth.

NOTE: For the sake of format consistency, the Commission has chosen to use the phrase "gay and lesbian youth" to describe all youth who suffer from prejudice based on sexual identity. In reality, however, this term is meant to be inclusive of not only gay and lesbian youth but also those who self-identify as bisexual, those whose dress does not conform to gender expectations, those who are themselves heterosexual but have gay and lesbian family members, or those who are simply perceived by others to be gay or lesbian.

I. HARASSMENT OF GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

"I just began hating myself more and more, as each year the hatred towards me grew and escalated from just simple name-calling in elementary school to having persons in high school threaten to beat me up, being pushed and dragged around on the ground, having hands slammed in lockers, and a number of other daily tortures."---Steven Obuchowski, 18, testifying at the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth's Public Hearings.

"Last year at my high school, there was an incident which shocked everyone. Two female students were standing in the hall with their arms around each other. Students began to encircle them and yell profanities, until a group of about thirty kids surrounded them."---Zoe Hart, 17, senior at Lincoln-Sudbury High School, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Gay and lesbian youth report that they are subjected to a wide range of verbal and physical abuse in school from other students and sometimes even from teachers. This abuse can be delivered in many forms, ranging from derogatory slurs to violent beatings. School for these young men and women is far from being a safe place.

At the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth's Public Hearings, young gays and lesbians gave testimony about the terrorizing anti-gay violence that they face in their schools.

"We were picked on. We were called 'queer' and 'faggot' and a host of other homophobic slurs. We were also used as punching bags by our classmates, just for being different."---Chris Muther, 23, testifying at the Public Hearings about himself and his friend, Richard, who later committed suicide.

"I was very different from the other students and everyone picked up on it. Immediately the words 'faggot' and 'queer' were used to describe me. In Wareham, being anything but a cool jock is socially unacceptable."---Randy Driskell, 18, senior at Wareham High School, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"At Eaglebrook, homophobia and hazing were rampant. I had to be adamantly heterosexual and had to make dehumanizing comments about girls or else be labelled a faggot. I had to prove my masculinity by hazing the underclassmen. Others found pushing wasn't enough and so turned to whiffle-ball bats. Once someone was rolled down cement steps in a laundry bag just for the fun of it."
---Devin Beringer, 17, senior at Concord Academy, testifying at the Public Hearings.

NEARLY HALF OF GAY MEN AND ONE IN FIVE LESBIANS ARE HARASSED OR ASSAULTED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

A survey of 2,074 gay adults conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 1984 found that 45% of the males and 20% of the females reported having experienced verbal or physical assaults in secondary school because they were perceived to be gay or lesbian.

"One of my best friends...was only suspected of being gay. He was not, as a matter of fact. But at that suspicion, only that suspicion, he was beaten up every day at school. He was unable to attend classes many days."---Chris Collins, University of Massachusetts-Amherst student, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Violence against gay and lesbian students in school is part of an increasing incidence of violence against gays and lesbians in the world at large.

"The most frequent victims of hate violence today are blacks, Hispanics, Southeast Asians, Jews, and gays and lesbians. Homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims."---U.S. Justice Department (*The Response of the Criminal Justice System to Bias Crime: An Exploratory View*, 1987).

Massachusetts enacted the Hate Crimes Reporting Act in 1990, which provides for training of police and collection of statistics about hate crimes directed against gays and lesbians, blacks, Jews, and other minorities. However, the protection afforded adults by this law has yet to be extended to our schools.

97% OF STUDENTS SURVEYED AT LINCOLN-SUDBURY REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL REPORT HEARING ANTI-GAY COMMENTS IN SCHOOL

In Massachusetts, a survey designed by the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth was distributed to all students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School in February of 1993. Three hundred ninety-eight male and female students responded to the survey.

Students were asked the question, **"How often have you heard homophobic remarks made at your school?". An overwhelming 97.5 % of the respondents said they had heard homophobic remarks at school.** 49% percent of the students reported they had heard the remarks very often and 49% had heard the remarks sometimes. Only 2.5% had never heard anti-gay comments in school.

LACK OF SCHOOL POLICIES TO PREVENT ANTI-GAY HARASSMENT

Only a handful of schools in Massachusetts have policies which protect students against anti-gay harassment; few school administrations discipline students for name-calling and harassment of gay and lesbian students.

"Schools do not adequately protect gay youth, with teachers often reluctant to stop harassment or rebut homophobic remarks."---Paul Gibson, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (*Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*, 1989).

Gay and lesbian students, required by law like their peers to attend public schools, find themselves in a dangerous, unsafe environment day after day, yet despite their vulnerability, policies are not in place and teacher-training has not been undertaken to ensure their safety.

"I have spoken to teachers in schools on the issue of name-calling in the hallways and they feel they are not justified in going up to students in the hallways and saying, 'You cannot use that word.' And I ask them, if someone called an African-American student a nigger, would you stand around in your classroom and say, 'It's not my place to go out.'?"---Sharon Bergman, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Sometimes teachers and school personnel, in addition to students, are abusive towards gay and lesbian students. Dorothy Remur, the mother of a gay son, testified that when her son Douglas came out as gay in his senior year at Dedham High School, he faced hostility from teachers as well as students.

"The young women often caught one of the male gym teachers walking with the jocks of the school and the teacher was making derogatory hand signals towards Douglas. I realize that children can be very cruel, but when teachers and adults encourage or do not discourage mean and cruel behavior it makes me angry and very sad."---Dorothy Remur, mother of a gay son, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Teachers may wish to stop harassment and anti-gay comments, yet they lack the backing of administration. Few teachers have had specific training which would teach them to intervene effectively, and many fear reprisals without the explicit support and backing of their administration. Consequently, gay and lesbian youth bashing continues in our schools.

ABUSE OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

The messages gay and lesbian youth receive about themselves from homophobic peers and teachers are devastating. The hatred others inflict on them is often turned into self-hatred. The violence others unleash on them is often echoed in acts of self-destruction. Joyce Hunter of the Hetrick-Martin Institute, a community-based agency in New York City that provides services for gay and lesbian youth, emphasizes how abuse of these youth puts them at risk for suicide.

"Violence towards youths is also believed to be associated with violence towards oneself, manifested in the form of suicidal behavior."---Joyce Hunter, ("Violence Against Lesbian and Gay Male Youths," 1990).

In 1988, Hunter surveyed violence-victimization and self-destructive behavior among 500 self-identified gay and lesbian youth. Forty-one percent of these youths reported that they had experienced violent attacks, many at the hands of classmates. Forty-six percent of the violence against these young people was gay-related. **Suicidal ideation was found among 44% of those gay and lesbian youth who had experienced violent assaults.**

The harassment and violence encountered by many gay and lesbian youth in schools interferes with their right to a safe and complete education. In the worst case scenario, the threatening school environment can be a contributing factor to suicide or attempted suicide by gay and lesbian youth.

II. ISOLATION AND SUICIDE

"I felt as though I was the only gay person my age in the world. I felt as though I had nowhere to go to talk to anybody. Throughout eighth grade, I went to bed every night praying that I would not be able to wake up in the morning, and every morning waking up and being disappointed. And so finally I decided that if I was going to die, it would have to be at my own hands.""---Steven Obuchowski, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Steve Obuchowski tried to kill himself while attending a school that had no support group for gay and lesbian students and no counselling or referrals available. His belief that dying was the only way out of his isolation is a common one among gay and lesbian teens.

Gay and lesbian youth report that by junior high and high school they experienced intense feelings of aloneness in school. Often their isolation and pain is misunderstood by adults.

"Due to societal fear and ignorance, my teachers and counselors labelled my confusion as rebellion and placed me in the category of a troubled discipline problem. But still I had nothing to identify with and no role models to guide me, to help me sort out this confusion, and I began to believe that I was simply alone... A few weeks into my sophomore year, I woke up in a psych hospital in Brookline after taking my father's camping knife violently to my wrists and hoping for success."---Stacey Harris, Curry College student, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Stacey Harris, like Steve Obuchowski, made suicide attempts while attending high schools that had no support groups, nor any counselling, for gay and lesbian students.

SUICIDE AMONG GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

Suicide is the leading cause of death for gay and lesbian adolescents, according to the 1989 *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Gibson). The Federal study on youth suicide states:

* There is an epidemic of youth suicide in the United States today.
* 500,000 youths try to kill themselves each year.
*Between 1950 and 1980, there was a 170% increase in suicides of people between the ages of 15 and 24.
* Gay and lesbian youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.
***Gay and lesbian youth comprise 30% of completed youth suicides.**

Lack of school-based support groups for gay amd lesbian students in all but a few of Massachusetts public schools leaves the young gay or lesbian person alone with his or her feelings of difference at a time of life when acceptance from a peer group is so important. Many of the adolescents testifying at the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth's Public Hearings described feelings of profound isolation in school.

"I was always an outcast at school. Books were my best friends. I ostracized myself from the rest of the world because I felt as if I could trust no one, not even my parents. The pressure of feeling so alone manifested itself in fits of manic depression, hysterical outbreaks, and, eventually, suicidal tendencies."---Devin Beringer, 17, senior at Concord Academy, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"I couldn't see or find a community of people like me and so I felt I had no home anywhere, no place to relax and be myself."---Lee Fearnside, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

The pervasive name-calling and threats of anti-gay harassment in school force many students to further isolate themselves from their classmates in order to protect their safety. Dorothy Remur, the mother of a gay son, described her son's aloneness in school.

"One of the teachers told me how the other children treated my son. She told me how they pushed and shoved him, knocking the books out of his hands. Douglas made a point to walk through the hallways after the final bell so they were almost empty. This was to protect himself."---Dorothy Remur, parent, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Schools become places where gay and lesbian students feel cut off from their heterosexual peers, as well as from teachers, counselors, and administrators. Students in rural areas, far from any signs of a visible gay/lesbian community, often feel even more alone.

"On the Cape where I live, there is nothing for gay and lesbian youth. I knew something had to be done, but I didn't know what."---Randy Driskell, 18, senior at Wareham High School, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Marilyn C. McManus writes of the isolation young gays and lesbians experience in rural schools.

"They experience the same pressures urban gay and lesbian youth face. These stresses are, however, exacerbated for rural youth. They are geographically isolated and are even less likely to find supportive role models than their urban peers. Rural youth have a more difficult time identifying peers struggling with sexual orientation issues, lack access to support networks, and are less likely...to find gay-

positive materials in their libraries or schools."---Marilyn C. McManus ("Serving Gay and Lesbian Youth," 1991).

In addition to the lack of peer support and acceptance at school, many of the gay and lesbian youth testifying at the Public Hearings reported a lack of accurate information about who gays and lesbians really are. Gay and lesbianstudents also reported a lack of information about resources for gay and lesbian youth.

"I went to Boston English High. There was no literature in the school at all. The guidance counselor wouldn't even recommend BAGLY (The Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth) ---Anthony Flynn, testifying at the Public Hearings.

LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND RISK FOR SUICIDE

The negative views about gays and lesbians so commonly expressed by students in class, in the halls, and during school activities teach the lesbian or gay adolescent to develop a negative self-image. With no one to talk to and with pervasive abuse, school becomes, not a place of self-actualization, but a place where the young gay or lesbian person learns to hate himself/herself.

"But who could I talk to? Through the last few years, I had been conditioned into believing gay is wrong....After three years of conditioning, I forgot all the things my mother taught me. I lost respect for myself and wanted to die."---Randy Driskell, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"I felt completely isolated from my family and friends. It appeared that I was the only one who ever had these queer feelings. I couldn't come out to anyone. After all, who would associate with anyone who was sick and deranged as I thought myself to be if they knew the truth. Not only does society shout at me that I am evil, but an inner voice whispers it as well."---Lee Fearnside, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Doctor John T. Maltsberger, one of the country's leading experts on suicide, reports that self-hatred, low self-esteem, and intense feelings of aloneness are typical of the profile of a suicidal person.

"In the grips of aloneness the patient is convinced he will be forever cut off from the possibility of human connectedness; in suicidal worthlessness, the patient is convinced he can never merit the caring notice of anyone, including himself, again. The subjective result is the same; to be beyond love is to be hopelessly alone."---John Maltsberger, (*Suicide Risk: The Formulation of Clinical Judgment*, 1986).

"WHAT SCHOOL SUPPORT GIVES KIDS IS LIFE."

Many students at the Governor's Commission Public Hearings testified that suicide attempts by gay and lesbian youth might be prevented if support were available at school.

"I think if I was made more aware of support groups for young gay and lesbian people, I really had no idea at all of any support groups, and if people were a lot more compassionate, then I think that things may have been different, and perhaps I could have led a more normal life."---Steve Obuchowski, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"I never slashed, I never swallowed, I never jumped; I was much luckier than some of the people that we have heard today. As different as each episode was, the reasons for stopping short were the same. Every time, I was able to call on someone from the Concord Academy Gay/Straight Alliance, or someone who I'd come out to through the strength and support I received there, and call out for help."---Sharon Bergman, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Devin Beringer, who is currently a senior at Concord Academy, also believes that having a support group in school and sympathetic people to talk with made the difference in his life.

"I've spent more than one lonely night sobbing while downing shot after shot, and I've also planned out my suicide more than once. Fortunately I was not alone. There were gay students and gay faculty to whom I could go for help."---Devin Beringer, 17, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Reluctance on the part of the vast majority of schools to encourage discussions of gay and lesbian issues for students and faculty perpetuates the isolation and loneliness of lesbian/gay teens that so often drives them to attempt suicide. Unfortunately for far too many young people, fear of these discussions continues to prevent schools from being able to take the steps necessary to create a supportive environment for all students.

"That is the first step: when the teachers and the principals and the superintendents are not afraid, then the students are not afraid. And when the students are not afraid, they will live. The question is not a matter of a smoother high school experience. What school support gives kids is life."---Sharon Bergman, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

60% OF STUDENTS SURVEYED AT LINCOLN-SUDBURY HIGH SCHOOL THINK HIGH SCHOOLS SHOULD HAVE GROUPS FOR GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS

In Massachusetts, a survey designed by the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth was distributed to all students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School in February of 1993.

Three hundred ninety-eight students reponded to the survey. When asked the question,"**Do you think high schools should have groups or clubs that support gay, lesbian, and bisexual students?". Sixty percent of the students answered "Yes", with 20% answering "No" and 18% undecided.**

III. DROP-OUT AND POOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

"During junior high and in my freshman year of high school, I was very depressed. Feeling alone and isolated from the rest of the world, I managed to fail three of my five majors that year."---Matthew Flynn, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"I suggested (to my father) that maybe I was failing because I am uncomfortable in school and avoid it as much as possible."---James Cohen, 15, student at the Commonwealth School in the Back Bay, testifying at the Public Hearings.

For many gay and lesbian students, school is not a place of learning, but a place where they feel profoundly isolated, sometimes even suicidal; a place where they are abused and terrorized by violence for being different. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that gay and lesbian students often have their right to an education jeopardized because of the hostility of the school environment.

"The shame of ridicule and fear of attacks makes school a fearful place to go, resulting in frequent absences and sometimes academic failure."---Paul Gibson, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ("Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide," 1989).

"My attendance at school has fallen steadily and school has become a place I no longer want to be, mostly, I feel, because of the lack of education and acceptance of diversity, but more so, the homophobia among faculty and students."---Adelaide Goetz, 16, junior at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, testifying at the Public Hearings.

ALIENATION FROM SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

In addition to experiencing academic difficulties, many gay and lesbian students report that hostility from their peers threatens their ability to participate in school activities such as athletics and social events.

Dorothy Remur testified of her gay son's difficulties in gym class.

"They (the school administration) told me that the gym class Douglas was attending consisted of a very tough group of boys, and they teased and tormented him terribly. The teacher couldn't control their behavior, so the only solution was to excuse Doug from the class. I requested that he be placed in another class. This never happened." ---Dorothy Remur, parent, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"Things had escalated where during gym class people would shove food and gum and other objects inside my clothing during the gym class."---Steven Obuchowski, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"Basketball has been the love of my life since I was a young child and I could never imagine not playing. But recently, the thoughts of not going out for the team have been very strong. I have spent the last two years ignoring homophobic comments during the season."---Adelaide Goetz, 16, testifying at the Public Hearings.

60% OF STUDENTS SURVEYED AT LINCOLN-SUDBURY REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL WOULD BE AFRAID OR UPSET IF PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY WERE GAY, LESBIAN, OR BISEXUAL

In Massachusetts, a survey designed by the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth was distributed to all students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School in February of 1993. Three hundred ninety-eight students responded to the survey. Students were asked the question,**"Would you be upset or afraid if people thought you were gay, lesbian, or bisexual?". Sixty percent of the students said "Yes", 22% didn't know how they would feel, and only 18% said "No".**

Students were also asked the question,**"How would your friends react to finding out someone they knew was gay, lesbian, or bisexual?". Thirty-four percent of the students thought their friends would be uncomfortable if they found out someone they knew was gay, lesbian, or bisexual; an additional 10% said they thought their friends would stop being friends with the person.** Only 15% of the students said they thought their friends would be supportive of a gay or lesbian acquaintance, with 20% saying their friends would be indifferent and 21% being unsure of the reaction.

FEAR, REJECTION, AND THE HIGH DROP-OUT RATE OF GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS

In many cases, feelings of alienation in classes and in school activities combined with hostility from peers make gay and lesbian adolescents unable to complete their high school education. **The 1989 "Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide" estimates that 28% of gay and lesbian youth drop out of school because of discomfort in the school environment.**

Troix Bettencourt concealed his homosexuality from the other students at Lowell High School. He was popular, and engaged in many school activities. Yet the internal strain led to an inability to continue in school.

"I couldn't handle being in high school living something that I wasn't, so I just dropped out and I just called it quits and I just couldn't handle it anymore. I thought

about suicide and I thought about leaving home because I just couldn't handle it anymore."---Troix Bettencourt, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Randy Driskell reports being driven out of high school because of constant verbal abuse and violence.

"I was spit on, pushed, and ridiculed. My school life was hell. I decided to leave school because I couldn't handle it."---Randy Driskell, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Dropping out of school combines with other stresses in the lives of gay and lesbian adolescents. Many face real or imagined rejection from family, and a growing sense of having no place of belonging or acceptance. Though some gay and lesbian youth manage to return to school after finding a supportive adult many wind up on the streets, out of school and out of a home.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that at any given time, gay and lesbian adolescents comprise a substantial percentage of street youth.

"Gay male, lesbian, bisexual, and transexual youth comprise as many as 25% of all youth living on the streets in this country. Here, they enter a further outcast status that presents serious dangers and even greater risk for suicide. Without an adequate education or vocational training, many are forced to become involved in prostitution in order to survive."---Paul Gibson, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ("Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide, 1989).

SUICIDE ATTEMPTS AND DISRUPTION OF HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

The frequency of suicide attempts by gay and lesbian youth is another factor which severely disrupts their education. The turmoil, hospitalization, and physical problems in the aftermath of suicide attempts can delay and often prevent successful completion of classwork and graduation from high school.

"I was placed in thirteen hospitals in two years. By what was supposed to be my junior year of high school, I had accumulated a resume consisting of five suicide attempts, two bottles of pills, four half-way houses, several high schools, and one family in shock. They (the doctors) told me I would never graduate high school."---Stacey Harris, Curry College student, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Tragic patterns of unhappiness and alienation in school, of being prevented from attending classes or enjoying school activites, of being driven to drop out or to attempt suicide: these all occur during the critical period of adolescent learning and intellectual growth. For far too many of our gay and lesbian youth, the fundamental right to an education is being taken away.

IV. GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH AND THEIR NEED FOR ADULT ROLE MODELS

"If not for the support I found in openly gay teachers at my high school, I would be dead today. I hope to God that future teachers have the courage to come out for their students."---Sharon Bergman, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"In the schools I went to, homosexuality was there, but it was never talked about. You were made to feel in school that you were different, that you were disgusting." ---Steven Wilson, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Adults set the tone of the school community. Through both explicit and implicit means, they send messages to students about what sorts of attitudes, behavior, and conduct are acceptable. Adults who work in Massachusetts schools are ill-equipped to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students. Either intimidated or ignorant, school staffs often fail to provide these young people with the support and even with the protection they need.

At the Public Hearings of the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, many gay and lesbian adolescents spoke of their need for positive adult role models in school. Students who were fortunate enough to have such role models testified about the benefits.

"I was constantly denying the feelings I had for other guys. In the process of hiding these feelings, I repressed all emotions. Concord Academy changed all this. It was the first place I encountered that was even slightly gay-positive. When I arrived, an openly gay faculty member was assigned to be my advisor. Through him, I learned that being gay is not the horrible and disgusting thing society makes it out to be, but instead, a normal and natural part of me."---Devin Beringer, 17, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Studies such as those by Professor Gregory Herek of the University of California-Davis have shown that the key factor in reducing fear and intolerance of gays and lesbians is a positive personal experience with an openly gay or lesbian person. (Herek, 1985). The presence of openly gay/lesbian staff members is a crucial component of any school program seeking to reduce bigotry and provide support for lesbian and gay students. However, the vast majority of youth attend schools with no openly gay or lesbian personnel.

HOSTILITY TOWARDS GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH ON THE PART OF SCHOOL STAFF

Often teachers and school personnel, in addition to being unresponsive to the needs of gay and lesbian students, will themselves be overtly hostile to these young people and use derogatory language about gays and lesbians.

"An administrator in my school, after a particularly embarassing episode, used in her defense, 'Well, you must have A.I.D.S. You're gay, aren't you?' She didn't realize how much that hurt."---James Cohen, 15, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Arthur Lipkin, who taught for twenty years at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, testified about an incident of verbal abuse by an adult staff member.

"I was standing at one end of a corridor and at the other end two male students were wrestling, just horsing around, I guess. I saw the school security person approach these two boys. She bellowed at them, 'Break it up, you homos!' The corridor echoed with her words and I was horrified. I challenged her on the spot and she replied bitterly, 'I wasn't talking to you.'"---Arthur Lipkin, teacher, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Research by Professor James Sears of the University of South Carolina showed that 8 out of 10 teachers in training harbored anti-gay attitudes. Fully one-third were rated as 'high-grade homophobes,' using a classification system designed to reveal the depth of anti-gay feelings. (Sears, 1989). The chilling effect of such adult bigotry on gay and lesbian youth is self-evident.

TEACHERS FEAR SUPPORTING GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS

An atmosphere of intolerance in the schools intimidates gay and lesbian teachers into remaining closeted, thus denying students role models they need. Gay and lesbian teachers testifying at the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth's Public Hearings spoke of being afraid they would be harassed, dismissed, or even physically attacked if they were open about being gay or lesbian in school.

Maryanne Jennings, an English teacher in the Springfield Public Schools for the past 21 years, testified about her fears concerning becoming known in her school as a lesbian teacher.

"Today in school it's okay to hate gays and lesbians; it's actually encouraged by the behaviors and attitudes of faculty and staff. It's not a safe environment. I have not felt safe since my face was on television a few weeks ago on the 20/20 segment on lesbians. In fact, in my school I've experienced an awful lot of harassment in the weeks since then."---Maryanne Jennings, teacher, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Unfortunately, research studies and anecdotal evidence both suggest that teachers' fears are not misplaced. **A study by University of South Carolina Professor James Sears found that the majority of school administrators surveyed said they would indeed fire a teacher whom they knew to be gay or lesbian. (Harbeck, 1992).**

Gay and lesbian students suffer because of the silence and fears of their teachers. The young gay or lesbian person's experience of isolation worsens through sensing the shame and invisiblity on the part of adults in the school. Kathy Henderson, the co-director of the Gay and Lesbian School Teachers Network (GLISTN) and a teacher at Phillips Academy (Andover), says fear prevents teachers from protecting students against anti-gay harassment.

"Most teachers, gay or straight, are afraid to speak up when they hear homophobic remarks. They feel it might put them at risk, that people might say, 'What are you---gay?', which remains a frightening question for most teachers to answer in the current climate."---Kathy Henderson, teacher, testimony submitted to the Governor's Commission.

The experience of Robert Cornigans, a gay African-American English teacher, is a case study of what many teachers fear would happen if they tried to help their students by standing up to anti-gay bigotry. In 1988, Mr. Cornigans was hired as a substitute teacher at a private school.

"I can see I was hired in mid-October to fill one niche in his quest for diversity, and fired in mid-December because my being gay represented a niche that was too diverse for him to handle."---Robert Cornigans, testimony submitted to the Governor's Commission.

Cornigans originally had no intention of being open about being gay, but events put him in a difficult position.

"One of my freshman students...confronted me with an essay, the essence of which suggested all gays should be hung....Perhaps I shouldn't have said anything to 'Matthew,' and held my tongue as I had done so many times in the past, but I didn't. 'You can't,' a voice inside me said, 'because here's a kid who needs someone to help him.' So I said...'I'm gay.'...A few weeks later I let another student who asked me about my girlfriend know I was gay by showing him a letter (nothing of an erotic nature) I'd written to my boyfriend. That was the extent of my conversations with either boy about homosexuaity."---Robert Cornigans.

About a week later, the headmaster told Cornigans he was dismissed because he'd "ruined the boys' lives." Most of the student body and many faculty members petitioned the headmaster to reconsider his position, but he would not.

The Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Law, which passed in 1989, protects teachers, as well as other workers, against employment discrimination

based on sexual orientation. Yet few schools in their faculty handbooks or in teacher contracts explicitly make a commitment to enforcing equal rights protection for gay and lesbian faculty. The fear of discrimination on the part of adults in school remains pervasive, extending even beyond those who really are gay or lesbian.

"Heterosexual professionals also face pressures. Like their lesbian or gay colleagues, they may fear that nondiscriminatory work for lesbian and gay adolescents would open them to the charge of 'promoting homosexuality.' The school climate is fraught with risks."---Joyce Hunter ("Stresses on Lesbian and Gay Adolescents in Schools," 1987).

Several teachers who spoke at the Public Hearings, however, testified about how they were able to overcome their fears and begin to serve as role models for their students. Robert Parlin, a teacher at Newton South High School, cites two issues that motivated him to take the step to come out to his students:

"First, I began to think about the terrible messages that closeted gay teachers send to their students: that being gay is shameful, not an appropriate subject for discussion; that lesbians and gay men were not welcome or valued members of the school community; and second, I received tremendous support and encouragement from my principal, my department chair, and a large group of faculty members."---Robert Parlin, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Parlin tesified about the positive effect being honest with his students had on his teaching.

"My students responded with thoughtfulness, compassion, and sincere respect. Many came up to me later that day to tell me how much they admired what I had done and how it had changed their way of thinking about gay people....The reverse of my fears occurred. I actually became closer to my students as a result of coming out."---Robert Parlin.

Only a few public schools in Massachusetts have made a commitment to protecting and upholding the rights of gay and lesbian teachers and others wishing to provide support for lesbian/gay students. Most school environments continue to remain as threatening for the adult staff as they are for the young people, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual, who need their support and guidance.

V. FAMILIES OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

"On reflecting about homosexuality, I've learned that: my religious tradition taught me to believe that my son was a sinner; my medical support system taught me to believe that my son was sick; my educational system taught me that my son was abnormal; my legal system views my son and his partner in an unsanctioned relationship without legal rights and protection that are afforded my married daughter; my family, immediate and extended, provided no acknowledgement or support for having a gay relative in its midst; my major communication sources treated homosexuality as deviant."----James Genasci, father of a gay son, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Families, and parents particularly, are profoundly affected when a child or sibling is gay or lesbian. The expected course of family life is changed irrevocably. And the course it takes, the new actions and attitudes it assumes toward the gay/lesbian teen, can mean the difference between life and death.

GAY AND LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS IN THE CLOSET

"I still have to come out to my parents, but we have grown distant...and they hardly know me anymore. I'm afraid of what their reaction might be."---Devin Beringer, 17, testifying at the Public Hearings.

If the teen has not come out to his or her parents, a rift develops in which both family and teen feel separated from each other. The secrets needed to maintain silence pile up like the Berlin Wall, increasing the teen's isolation from his family and his sense of aloneness.

"It cannot get back to my 12 year-old sister that I am anything apart from a carefree, heterosexual high school senior or as my father so eloquently put it, 'The heavens will fall in on your petty life.'"---Zoe Hart, 17, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"Over these past two years, I have seen that she knows what it means not to be able to share this information with parents and friends, and how painful it is."---Happie Byers, grandmother of a lesbian teen, testifying at the Public Hearings.

OUT TO THE FAMILY

If the gay/lesbian teen reveals his or her identity, the family unit is often deeply shaken. It must revise its image of the teen, but also of itself as a unit. The family must deal with the many feelings that follow, and the reactions of extended family and community.

Parents testifying at the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth's Public Hearings spoke of being unprepared for the news that their son or daughter was gay or lesbian.

"Society had ill-prepared me to be the father of a gay son. To be brought up in this society is to be brought up homophobic."---James Genasci, testifying at the Public Hearings.

"We began to ask ourselves the guilt-based question, 'What did I do wrong?' After all, our Italian-American and Irish-American families were saturated with Roman Catholic doctrine and the cultural imperative of normality. Clearly we had failed and he was somehow defective."---Sandra Bayne, mother of a gay son, testifying at the Public Hearings.

THE FAMILY IN THE CLOSET

The family must cope with how the world reacts to them as a family with a gay or lesbian member, as well as to the teen himself/herself. The organization P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) finds that often families go into the closet when their gay/lesbian child comes out.

"We began, perhaps worst of all, to live the lie. This is the extremely stressful experience of monitoring everything you say lest you reveal what cannot be revealed, and then lying to hide the truth....Lying breeds self-loathing, so you begin to avoid those to whom you must lie."---Sandra Bayne, testifying at the Public Hearings.

SILENCE, IGNORANCE, AVOIDANCE

Families often have no realistic conception of what it means to be gay or lesbian or to have a loved one who is lesbian or gay. They have been exposed to stereotypes of gays and lesbians and rarely have read accurate books or articles about gay/lesbian people. Three themes which have permeated society's attitudes and treatment of young gays or lesbians are: silence, ignorance, and avoidance. Society usually talks about homosexuality in a pejorative sense and avoids the presence and needs of young gays and lesbians. The result of this atmosphere is a family in denial and in great distress.

Often when families learn that a son or daughter is gay or lesbian, the reaction is shame and guilt. Without support or knowledge, they feel confused and alone.

"In the beginning, I was full of sadness and fear for our son and his partner...and along with my husband, wondered who would be supportive."---Jean Genasci, mother of a gay son, testifying at the Public Hearings.

HOSTILITY AND REJECTION FROM FAMILY

Some parents turn against their lesbian/gay child in anger and these teens are thrown out of their homes or driven to run away. Sometimes these gay/lesbian adolescents end up on the streets, becoming self-destructive and all too often attempting suicide.

"I got kicked out of my house in July, and at that point there was violence involved. My mother went nuts and came at me with an iron and I ran downstairs and I locked the door and she called the police. The police came and they asked what was going on. And I told them, and my mother started saying that I'm always in Boston with the fags and that I'm doing this and I'm doing that. And he started cracking all kinds of gay jokes and telling me what he would do to his kids if they were gay and he told me that I should leave."---Troix Bettencourt, 18, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Twenty-six percent of young gays and lesbians are forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual orientation, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Gibson, "Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide," 1989).

"Then came the moment of truth. My dad wanted an explanation, a reason for my disenrollment from the ROTC, and my very worst fears were realized when I suddenly became persona non grata in my own home."---Chris Collins, University of Massachusetts-Amherst student, testifying at the Public Hearings.

PARALLEL ISSUES BETWEEN GAY AND LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

"We experience the same feelings our children have experienced: the utter confusion over what homosexuality means, the fear of not fitting into a very uniform society, the fear of rejection by our parents and relatives and friends, even the fear of physical harm, and of course A.I.D.S.."---Sandra Bayne, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Many of the same issues afflicting young gays and lesbians also afflict their families: isolation, rejection, feelings of failure, disappointment and rage.

"My family, immediate and extended, provided no acknowledgement or support." ---James Genasci.

SUICIDE AND ITS EFFECT ON FAMILIES

The devastating effect of suicide, or suicide attempts, on the family unit cannot be overestimated. Mary Griffith's son, Bobby, killed himself at age 20 by jumping off an overpass onto a highway. Mary had been a Christian Fundamentalist. When she and her husband found out that Bobby was gay when he was sixteen, they tried to "cure" him through prayer and a Christian counselor. Since her son's death, Mary has come to regret that her family did not accept Bobby's gay identity.

"We never thought of a gay person as an equal, lovable, and valuable part of God's creation. What a travesty of God's unconditional love....Had I viewed my son's life with a pure heart, I would have recognized him as a tender spirit in God's eyes."---Mary Griffith, mother of a gay son who committed suicide.

When JoAnne Cardell's sister, Nancy, told her that she was a lesbian, JoAnne responded judgmentally.

"I told Nancy that I thought that gays were disgusting and I couldn't stand the sight of them, and never wanted to be around them again."---JoAnne Cardell, sister, testimony submitted to the Governor's Commission.

When Nancy died from an overdose of drugs in an apparent suicide, JoAnne felt overwhelmed with remorse.

"I now have an unbelievable amount of guilt due to the discriminatory comment I made to her years ago. I can never take back what I said, and this is one of the main reasons I want to do everything I can to help make this world a better place for those who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual....If families and society could only realize the deep scars they are digging every time there is gay bashing, a life could be saved."---JoAnne Cardell.

Ruth, a mother of a lesbian daughter who killed herself, blames society's ignorance for her daughter's suicide.

"A wonderful child, with an incredible mind, is gone because our society can't accept people who are 'different' from the norm. What an awful waste. I will miss my daughter for the rest of my life. I'll never see her beautiful smile or hear her glorious laugh. I'll never see her play with her sister again. All because of hatred and ignorance. I strongly believe that the seeds of hate are sown early in life. Let's replace them with love, understanding and compassion. We have no choice: this terrible tragedy will continue to repeat itself and someday it may be your wonderful child who is gone forever."---Ruth, mother of a lesbian daughter who committed suicide; testimony submitted to the Governor's Commission.

Families of gay and lesbian teenagers need help for themselves in dealing both with their feelings and with the prejudice and mythology of the outside world. They need help as well in order to be able to advocate for the physical and emotional safety of their lesbian/gay teen who must navigate though a school and social life

made dangerous by those who hate or fear him/her for being different. Parents and families need help in order to alleviate the guilt and shame they feel, and to empower themselves and their son or daughter in this journey.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth recommends that school systems create programs and policies to ensure that gay and lesbian students are safe in Massachusetts schools and that they are able to realize fully their potential to learn.

We recommend that Governor Weld, the Department of Education and the Executive Office of Education support our recommendations for schools and devise a plan for implementing them in secondary schools throughout Massachusetts.

Our five key recommendations for schools are:

1. SCHOOL POLICIES PROTECTING GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS FROM HARASSMENT, VIOLENCE , AND DISCRIMINATION

School systems should make public commitments to ensure that schools are safe places, free of discrimination, violence, and harassment, for all students, including gay and lesbian youth.

2. TRAINING TEACHERS/ COUNSELORS/ SCHOOL STAFF IN CRISIS INTERVENTION AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Teachers, guidance counselors, and all school staff should be equipped with the training necessary to respond to the needs of gay and lesbian students, including protecting them from harassment and violence, and intervening to prevent suicide and dropping out.

The Higher Education Coordinating Council should facilitate changes in teacher-training standards so that all certified teachers and educators will receive training in issues relevant to the needs and problems faced by gay and lesbian youth. Such training should be a requirement for teacher certification and school accreditation.

3. SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT GROUPS FOR GAY AND STRAIGHT STUDENTS

Gay and lesbian students experience intense isolation, putting them at great risk for suicide. Every high school in the Commonwealth should establish a support group where gay and straight students can meet each week and discuss gay and lesbian youth issues. These gay/straight student alliances should have a faculty advisor.

In addition, existing school counselling services should expand their knowledge and resources to meet the needs of gay and lesbian students.

4. INFORMATION IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES FOR GAY AND LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS

School libraries are an important resource for students seeking to learn more on any issue. All school libraries should develop a collection of literature, books, films, and pamphlets for students seeking to learn more on gay and lesbian issues. In particular, a collection of gay and lesbian youth resource information should be developed. The school should widely publicize the existence of this literature through displays, posters, etc..

5. CURRICULUM WHICH INCLUDES GAY AND LESBIAN ISSUES

Learning about gay and lesbian people, including their experiences and contributions to society, should be integrated into all subject areas. School systems should urge teachers to continue their education in order to integrate gay and lesbian themes and issues into their subject areas.

EACH OF THE ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS IS EXPLAINED MORE FULLY IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: SCHOOL POLICIES WHICH PROTECT GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS

Written, formal school policies help prevent discrimination, harassment, and verbal abuse of gay and lesbian students and young people perceived to be lesbian or gay. By making schools safe for gay and lesbian youth, we can prevent drop-out that results from students feeling threatened at school. We can also improve the ability of young people to learn.

We recommend that the following policies be formally adopted by schools, and publicized in areas such as student, faculty, and PTA handbooks:

1. ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES

Schools should include sexual orientation as a protected category in nondiscrimination policies for students and teachers, including teacher contracts.

2. POLICIES WHICH GUARANTEE EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Schools should establish policies which ensure the rights of gay and lesbian students to education and guarantee equal access to all school courses and school activities.

3. ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

1. Schools should adopt and publicize policies which prohibit anti-gay language and harassment on the part of faculty and students.

2. Clear procedures should be established to deal with incidents of anti-gay harassment and violence, including penalties for such behavior.

3. Clear guidelines should be established for dealing with anti-gay epithets and speech.

4. MULTICULTURAL AND DIVERSITY POLICIES

Schools should include gay and lesbian issues within appropriate policies and programs concerning diversity or multiculturalism.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: TRAINING TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS IN SUICIDE PREVENTION AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

School professionals must be equipped with the knowledge necessary for meeting the needs of gay and lesbian students in a sensitive and caring manner. Teachers and school counselors must be trained in how to create a safe and inclusive school environment for gay and lesbian students so that suicides, drop-outs, and incidents of harassment and violence can be prevented.

The teacher/counselor training would have a dual focus. The short-term focus would be to provide teachers and counselors with the necessary skills to intervene effectively with gay and lesbian youth who are in crisis. The long-term focus would seek to equip educators with the skills to create a lasting safe and supportive environment in school for gay and lesbian students, so that the need for future crisis intervention would be reduced or eliminated.

We recommend that teachers, counselors, and school staff in Massachusetts public schools be trained in the following:

1. VIOLENCE PREVENTION

We recommend that educators be trained in how to intervene when students who are gay or lesbian, or perceived to be gay or lesbian, are harassed or threatened by other students.

2. CRISIS INTERVENTION

We recommend that educators be trained and learn how to respond to a gay or lesbian student who seeks help because of isolation, or emotional and physical problems.

3. COUNSELLING REFERRALS

We recommend that educators learn how to make appropriate referrals for gay and lesbian students to counselors, including family counselors, and youth-service agencies.

4. WORKSHOPS FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

We recommend that all school systems sponsor workshops for teachers and school staff members to learn how to meet the needs of gay and lesbian students. Included in this education process should be a commitment to addressing and eliminating discriminatory attitudes directed against gay and lesbian people in general.

Goals of a workshop for teachers/staff include:

1. Discussing the special needs of gay and lesbian students
2. Learning about health problems of gay and lesbian youth, such as their high risk for suicide
3. Providing participants with resource materials for responding to the needs of gay lesbian students
4. Learning to relate anti-gay discrimination to other forms of prejudice
5. Discussing participants' existing attitudes towards gay and lesbian people
6 Creating a safe environment for gay and lesbian staff members to be open about their sexual orientation.

5. CHANGES IN TEACHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS AND SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

We recommend that the Higher Education Coordinating Council facilitate and enforce specific changes in teacher-training programs and certification standards. We recommend that to become certified, teachers, counselors and educators be required to receive training in issues relevant to the needs of gay and lesbian students. Similarly, schools should be required to schedule in-service diversity trainings in order to receive accreditation from the appropriate professional associations.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT GROUPS FOR GAY AND STRAIGHT STUDENTS

Students are best supported by other students. Isolation and loneliness on the part of gay and lesbian students can lead to suicide attempts, run-away, drop-out, and a host of emotional and physical problems. Weekly support groups for gay and lesbian students, and any other students who want to talk about gay and lesbian issues, help to counter isolation and to give an ongoing voice to young people who need to be able to talk about their feelings, and about their identity.

Gay/straight alliances, and groups such as PROJECT 10, are effective in-school support groups. We recommend that these kinds of groups be established and supported by the administration in every high school in the Commonwealth.

We also recommend the following:

1. GROUPS OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS

Support groups should be open to all students, including self-identified gay and lesbian youth, heterosexual students supportive of their gay and lesbian peers, and any student wishing to discuss lesbian/gay issues in a safe and confidential environment.

2. FACULTY ADVISOR

A faculty advisor should be appointed to attend each meeting, listen to students and communicate their needs to the administration. School personnel with personal experience, such as self-identified gay and lesbian teachers, heterosexual teachers with gay/ lesbian friends or family, or the like, should be sought out for this role.
The faculty advisor should undergo extensive, in-depth professional training on the needs of gay and lesbian youth. Appropriate compensation should be offered for this role.

3. WIDE PUBLICITY OF GROUP'S EXISTENCE

The existence of a gay/straight alliance in a school should be widely publicized within the school so that all students know of the group's existence and purpose. Publicity should take the form of pamphlets, information in student and faculty handbooks, posters and flyers, announcements by teachers, etc..

4. STUDENT SUPPORT THROUGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

In addition to student support and discussion groups, we recommend that school counselors be trained to provide support and information for gay and lesbian youth in the school setting.

We have three specific recommendations for school counselors:

1. All school counselors, nurses, and social workers should receive training concerning gay and lesbian youth issues from professionals in their field.
2. The availability of counselling services for gay and lesbian students should be made known through publicity in the school such as posters, student handbooks, and announcements, so that a welcoming environment is creeated in the counseling setting.
3. Appropriate and timely referrals should be made for young people whose needs cannot be met within the school's counselling resources.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: INFORMATION IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES FOR GAY AND LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS

Young people need to have access to resources and information about gay and lesbian youth issues in school libraries. Information should include books, videos, pamphlets and other materials for use by students, parents, and teachers. Information should be available which provides for referrals to appropriate counselling and youth-service agencies which are trained in dealing with the needs of gay and lesbian adolescents.

We recommend the following:

1. School libraries should have a special, easily recognizable section of books and materials related to gay and lesbian issues.

2. Confidential sign-out procedures should be implemented so that students may use these resources without feeling a need to make a public statement.

3. School libraries should purchase films concerning gay and lesbian people in general, and gay and lesbian youth in particular, which are appropriate for viewing by the entire student body and by faculty.

4. School libraries should periodically display books and materials about gay and lesbian issues in a highly visible way.

5. School librarians should develop a reading list of books in the library on gay and lesbian issues which they can provide to teachers for inclusion in class reading lists.

6. Libraries should display a well-researched guide to resources for gay and lesbian youth, including community-based lesbian and gay youth groups such as BAGLY (the Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth) and P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: CURRICULUM WHICH INCLUDES GAY AND LESBIAN ISSUES

The classroom is the heart of the school experience. Discussion of gay and lesbian issues, and recognition of the contribution of gay people to history and to modern society, should be integrated into all subject areas and departments in an age-appropriate fashion.

We recommend the following:

1. Inclusive human development education, which addresses issues of sexual orientation, should be available to all students.

2. Students should be introduced to lesbian and gay culture in a variety of contexts, such as literature, history, the arts, and family life.

3. Biases in existing curriculum, such as the exclusive use of opposite-sex couples in math or foreign language exercizes, should be redressed.

4. Diversity programs, which address a variety of prejudices such as those against gay and lesbian people, women, and people of color, should be instituted and available to all students.

5. Academic departments should research ways to include the experiences and contributions of gay and lesbian people as they pertain to their discipline. Each department should set goals and timetables by which to achieve these curriculum changes, with regular assessment of departmental progress by relevant administrators.

6. School systems should encourage and support teachers attending conferences and furthering their education about gay and lesbian issues relevant to their subject area.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILIES OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

We recommend that Governor Weld, the Department of Education, and the Executive Office of Education support our recommendations for families of gay and lesbian youth and work in concert with the commission to provide the appropriate services and resources.

Our recommendations for helping families of gay and lesbian youth are:

1) PEER-COUNSELLING GROUPS IN THE P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) MODEL and, in times of crisis, FAMILY COUNSELLING IN SCHOOL

We recommend that the Department of Education support both long-term and short-term family and peer-group counselling for family members of young gays and lesbians. Such counselling should be supported in the school and within the community.

2) EDUCATION OF FAMILIES THROUGH INFORMATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

We recommend that all public libraries develop and display collections of up-to-date books as well as information on issues relating to gay and lesbian youth and their families. We also recommend that the Department of Education develops a resource guide for families of gay and lesbian youth.

3) PARENT SPEAKERS BUREAUS TO ADVOCATE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH IN SCHOOLS

Families can play an active role in working to make schools safe for gay and lesbian youth and to prevent suicide attempts and drop-out. We recommend that Governor Weld designate a parent in each school district who will advocate for gay and lesbian youth in schools, and with other parents and educators, make panel presentations in the community.

EACH OF THE ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS IS EXPLAINED MORE FULLY IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: PEER COUNSELLING IN THE P-FLAG MODEL AND FAMILY COUNSELLING IN SCHOOL

We recommend that the Department of Education support and develop organizations throughout Massachusetts which offer peer-group counselling for families of gay and lesbian youth. These should be ongoing, long-term support and discussion groups for families of gays and lesbians.

The organization P-FLAG, (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), offers a model for this kind of counselling where families of gays and lesbians provide help and understanding for other families. Information on the availability of groups such as these should be disseminated through PTAs and pupil service coordinators at schools.

The Department of Education should also support short-term family counselling as requested by families of gay and lesbian youth or by the youth themselves within the school setting. These meetings would seek to open up communication among family members in order to diminish family strains and prevent isolation of the gay or lesbian youth.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: EDUCATION OF FAMILIES THROUGH INFORMATION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

We recommend that public libraries develop and maintain an up-to-date collection of books and information on issues relating to gay and lesbianyouth and families of gays or lesbians, as well as books on gay and lesbian issues in general. Parents and families of gays and lesbians would play a role in the selection process. In addition, we recommend that public libraries include movies on gay and lesbian themes in their regular screening schedules and advertise them widely in the local community.

We also recommend that the Department of Education develop a resource guide for families of gay and lesbian youth to be distributed to every school principal and superintendent, to School Committees and PTA members, and to all school and public libraries. The resource guide should also be distributed to public clinics, hospitals, and a variety of human service agencies.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: PARENT SPEAKERS BUREAUS TO ADVOCATE FOR GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH IN SCHOOLS

We recommend that Governor Weld designate a parent liaison in every school district to work with the commission and to advocate for services for gay and lesbian

youth in schools. The parent would work to ensure a safe and supportive environment for young gays and lesbians within our public school system.

The Department of Education, in concert with the parent liaison, should create and support parent speakers bureaus throughout the state. These parent speakers bureaus would perform two functions: outreach and advocacy in the larger community, and education of groups within the school community. The bureaus would also communicate regularly with local School Committees and PTAs.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE AGENCIES AND TO THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE

The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth is making recommendations to three state agencies and to the Massachusetts legislature so that our recommendations for schools and families can be effectively implemented. **The Department of Education, the Executive Office of Education and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD),** together can play a powerful role as a catalyst in guiding school systems to learn about the problems of gay and lesbian students and in working to create a safe learning environment for them. **The Massachusetts Legislature** can guarantee the rights of gay and lesbian youth to public education.

State government can have an impact on local schools by:

* serving as a voice of influence
* compiling and disseminating policies and guidelines
* compiling and disseminating information and resources
* conducting outreach programs to inform and foster action

THE COMMISSION IS MAKING A TOTAL OF TEN RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE AGENCIES AND THE LEGISLATURE. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE EXPLAINED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1. SPONSOR TRAINING FOR TEACHERS, FAMILIES AND STUDENTS TO LEARN ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

We recommend that the Department of Education co-sponsor conferences and workshops with the commission to educate teachers and families about how to meet the needs of gay and lesbian students. The training should focus on suicide intervention, drop-out prevention, substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, and on making schools safe for all students, gay, lesbian, or heterosexual.

2. MAKE PRESENTATIONS TO SCHOOL COMMITTEE ASSOCIATIONS CONCERNING THE PROBLEMS FACED BY GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

We recommend that the Department of Education conduct presentations and workshops at meetings or conferences of School Committee Associations about the problems and needs of gay and lesbian students. The commission's recommendations should also be presented at these meetings. There should be at least one parent and one teenager in each group which presents to the School Committee members.

3. DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE A YELLOW PAGES RESOURCE BOOK ABOUT GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

We recommend that the Department of Education develop three separate versions of a resource book about services and support for gay and lesbian youth. Versions should be developed for students, for teachers, and for families.

These resource guides should be sent to school libraries, public libraries, PTA members, school committee members, school principals and guidance counselors, as well as to teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

1. DEVELOP AND PROMOTE ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS

We recommend that the Executive Office of Education conduct a statewide campaign, in cooperation with the Department of Education, to promote adoption of anti-harassment policies and guidelines which will protect all students, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual, in the Commonwealth. Guidelines should include suggestions for disciplinary action as well as procedures for handling incidents of anti-gay violence.

2. DEVELOP AND PROMOTE SCHOOL POLICIES THAT WILL GUARANTEE GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS EQUAL RIGHTS TO AN EDUCATION

We recommend that the Executive Office of Education conduct a statewide campaign, in cooperation with the Department of Education, to urge school systems to adopt and publicize policies which guarantee the rights of gay and lesbian students to an education. These policies should include protecting the rights of gay and lesbian students to participate in all courses of study as well as in school activities.

3. RESEARCH THE PROBLEMS OF GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS AND THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

We recommend that statewide research focusing on the problems faced in school by gay and lesbian students be conducted by the Executive Office of Education and that the results be widely publicized. The attitudes and needs of teachers, as well as those of family members of lesbian and gay adolescents, should be researched.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION (MCAD)

1. CONDUCT OUTREACH TO TEACHERS AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL TO INFORM THEM OF THEIR RIGHTS UNDER THE GAY CIVIL RIGHTS LAW

Many teachers and school professionals live in fear of losing their livelihood because they are unaware of their legal rights, or because their school administration has not explicitly made a commitment to protecting the civil rights of gay and lesbian educators. We recommend that the MCAD conduct a statewide outreach program to inform teachers, principals, and school personnel about the provisions of the state's Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Law, which was enacted in 1989. This outreach campaign should include informing educators about the legal remedies available to them.

2. SPONSOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AWARENESS PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS FOR ALL STUDENTS TO LEARN ABOUT THE GAY CIVIL RIGHTS LAW

We recommend that the MCAD make presentations in schools across the state to teach students about the state's gay and lesbian civil rights law, including the history of the law's passage, its impact on Massachusetts, and the provisions of the law.

3. SPONSOR LEGISLATION TO EXTEND MCAD'S JURISDICTION TO INCLUDE COMPLAINTS OF EDUCATION DISCRIMINATION

We recommend that the MCAD sponsor legislation to amend the Massachusetts General Laws to increase the scope of its jurisdiction to include investigation and prosecution of complaints of education discrimination, including but not limited to sexual orientation discrimination.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE

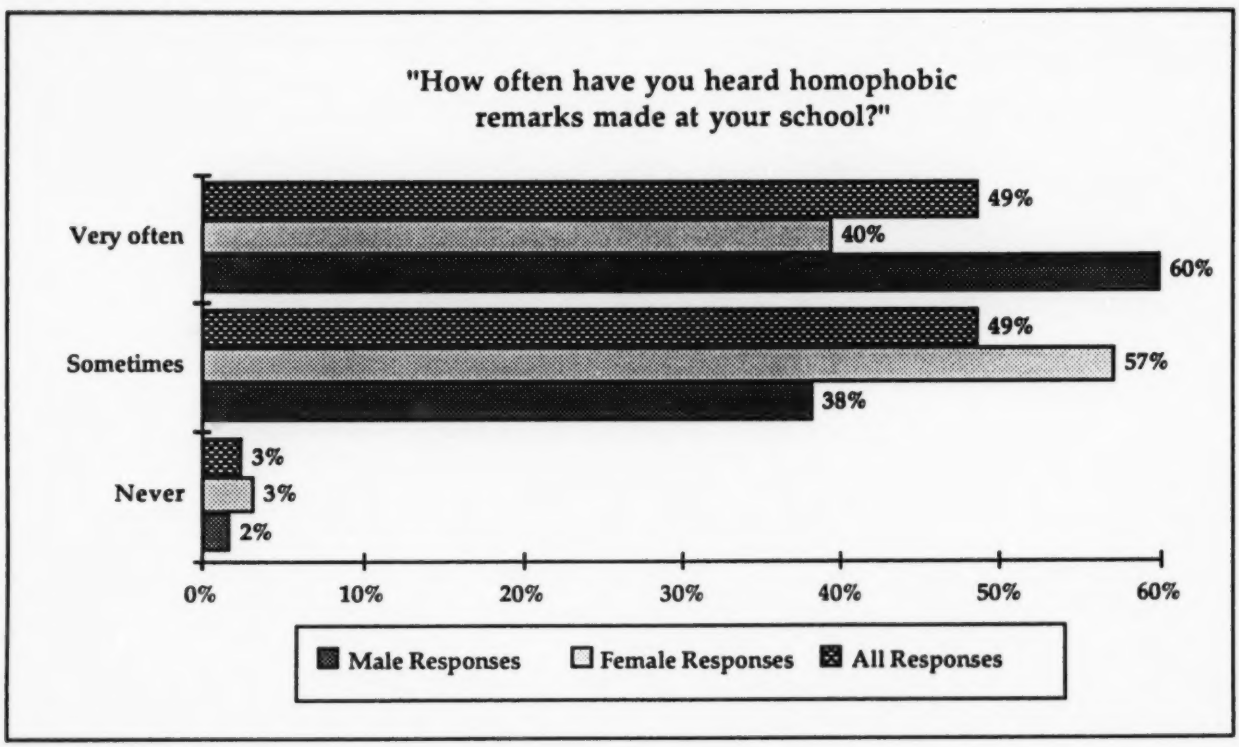
1. PASS THE BILL ENTITLED "AN ACT TO PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON THE BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION"

We recommend that the Massachusetts legislature enact and Governor Weld sign into law an amendment to section 5 of chapter 76 of the General Laws. The phrase "sexual orientation" shall be added to the existing law. The law would then read as follows:

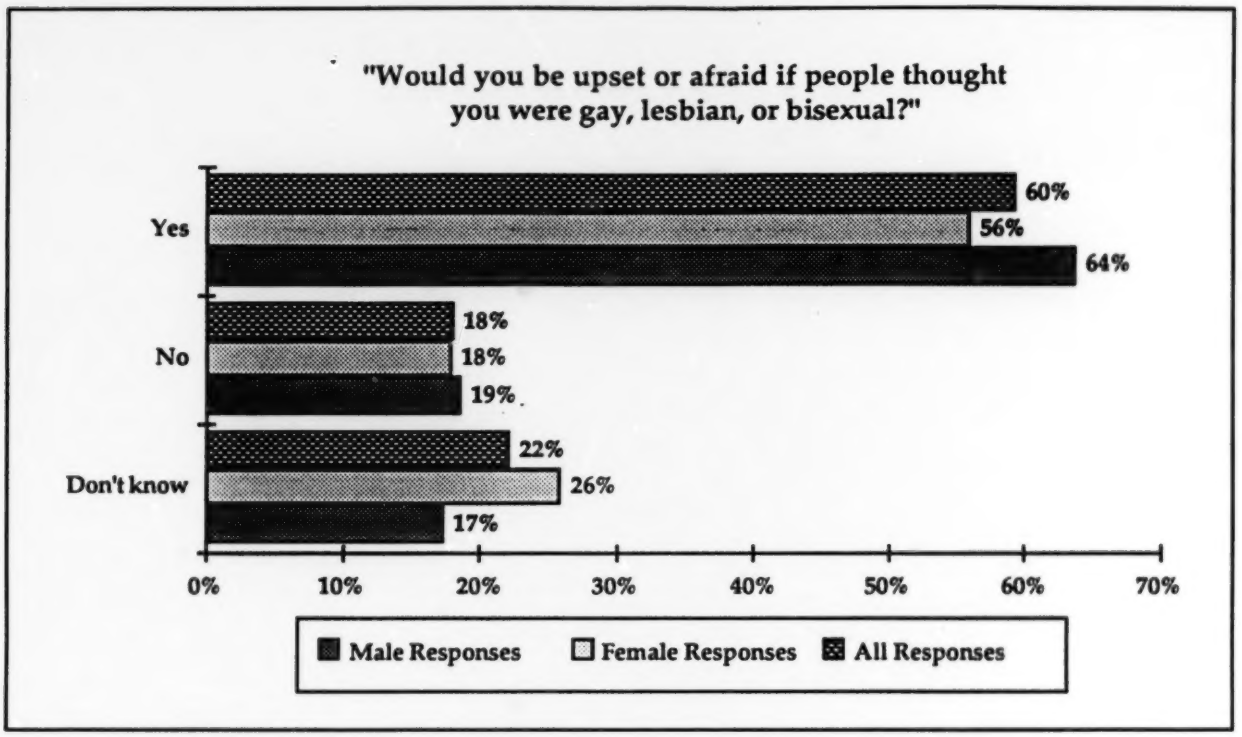
"No person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation."

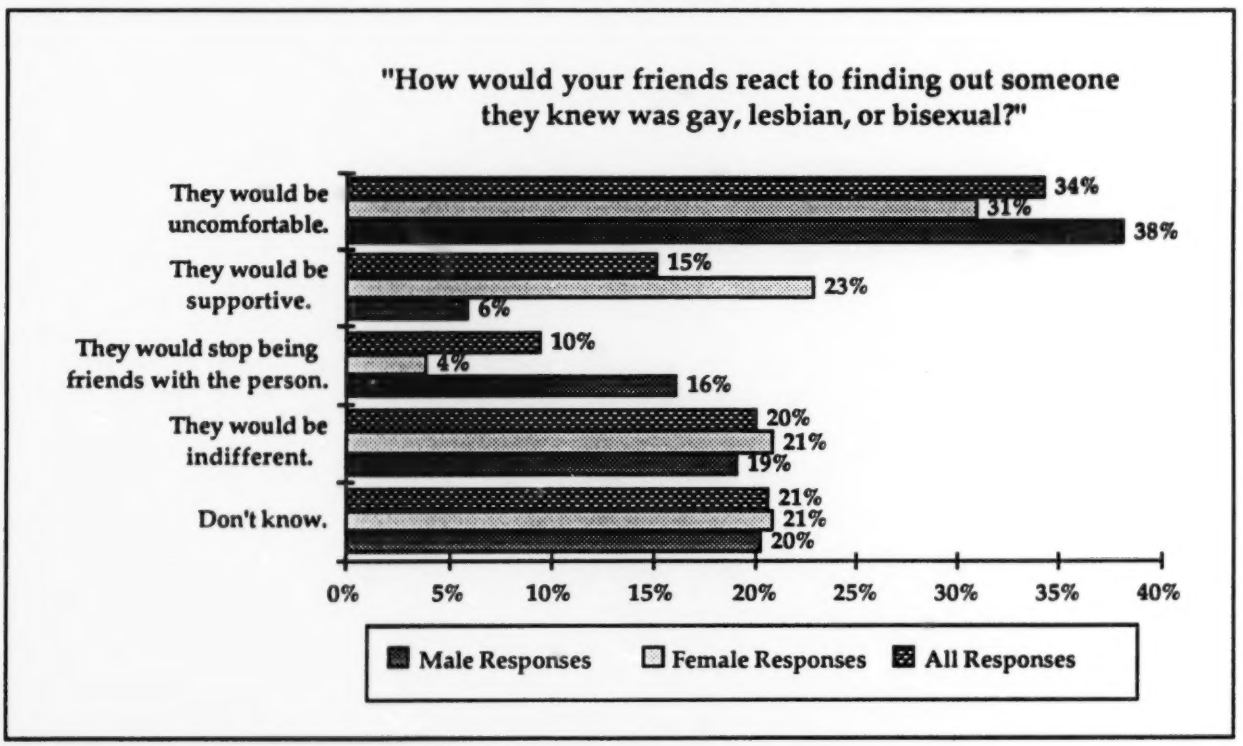
APPENDIX A — SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

In February 1993, the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth surveyed students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School about their attitudes towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. Approximately 400 students completed the surveys, which asked students to identify themselves by gender, grade level, and age. Respondents were also asked to answer twelve multiple choice questions, and were given an opportunity to add any additional comments related to the issues on the survey. We present here the results of five of the questions on the survey, along with the comments of some of the students. The verbatim questions and multiple choice answers are shown for each question. Full survey results are available from the Governor's Commission.

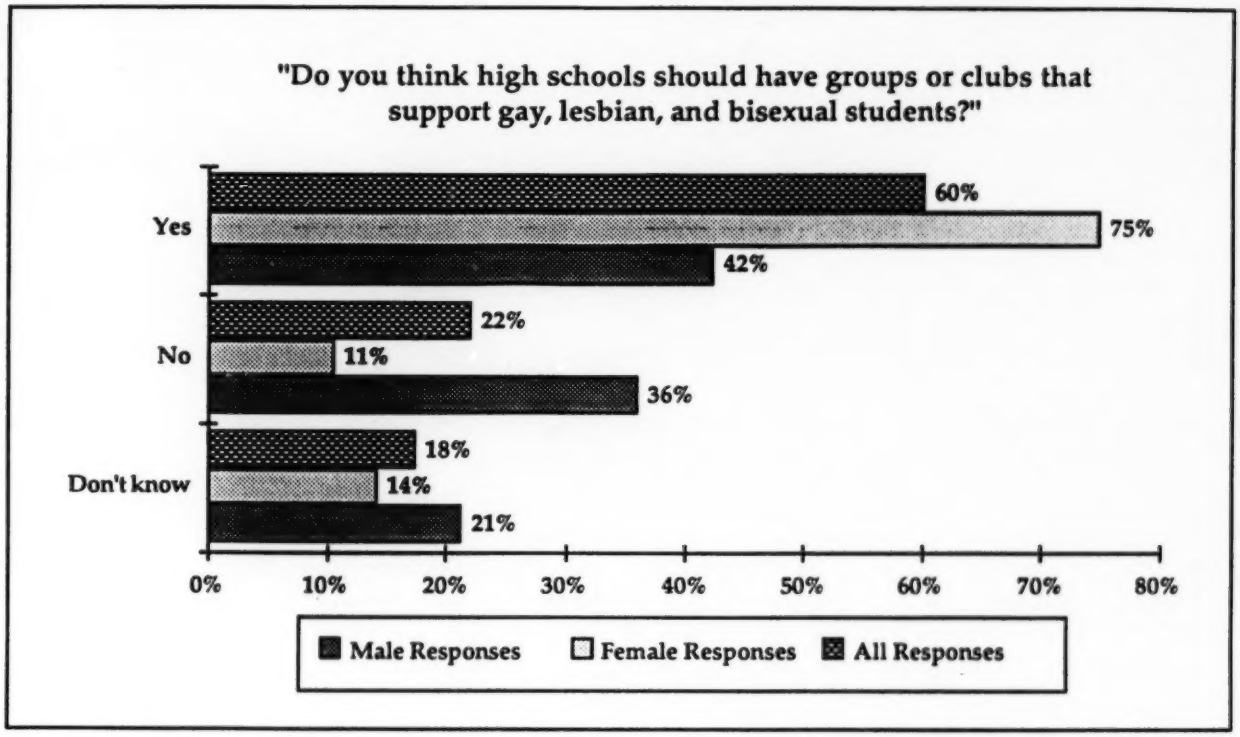


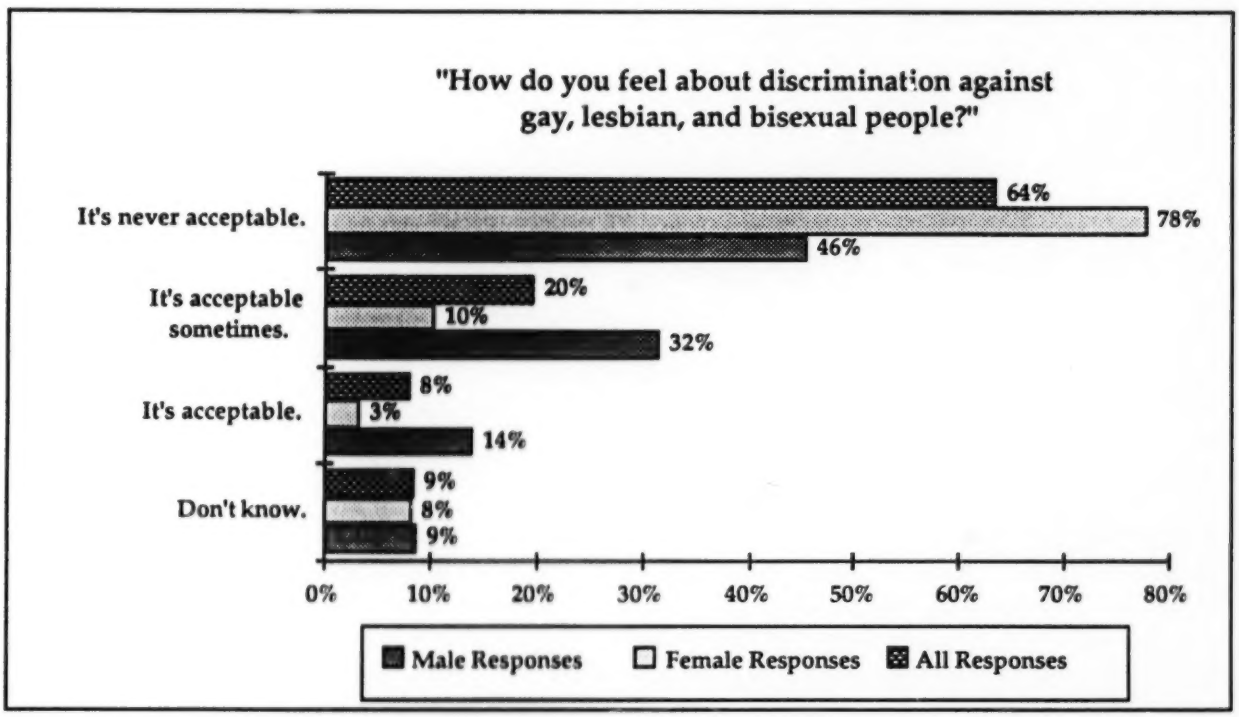
Note: Category totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, February 1993, N=402





Note: Category totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, February 1993, N=402





Note: Category totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, February 1993, N=402

Student Comments

"By having a club those who were gay would be revealed and then ridiculed by other students...Prejudices are things that we may try to ignore, and to deny. We may say we are not prejudiced, and make ourselves believe that. But as people we are constantly making assumptions and forming ideas of others. It is a sad truth." — Male, 17 years old

"...just keep them out of my sight and away from me." — Male, 16 years old

"I hate them." — Male, 16 years old

"I believe that homosexuals and bisexuals are living in sin. The person should not be discriminated against, but helped with the forgiveness of their sin by God."— Female, 17 years old

"I think that it is right to have support groups if the people were teased or need to get it in the open. But I think it should be treated like any club; if they get rowdy they should discontinue the club. No special treatment because that makes people think they are different." — Female, 14 years old

"Discrimination is wrong in any form." — Male, 14 years old

"Many people I know are homosexual. It is accepted even though it provides for some interesting conversation." — Female, 17 years old

"I am not gay but I have a friend who is & I think it is really mean when people make fun of him." — Female, 14 years old

"Learning about the gay and lesbian community should start at a young age. Some people I know are already prejudiced against homosexuals because they were never exposed to any information about them when they were younger." —Female, 16 years old

"I believe that this topic should be openly and more frequently discussed in schools. I believe that discrimination, of any kind is wrong. Educating people may help solve this problem." —Female, 18 years old

"I think it is important that in high schools students & teachers have open discussions on this topic." — Female, 18 years old

"People should be taught more in school about the subject." — Female, 14 years old

"I myself am going into the military next year and in response to the recent controversy surrounding gays/lesbians in the military - I think it is great if anybody wants to go into the military. They are certainly entitled to the same rights as I am." — Female, 18 years old

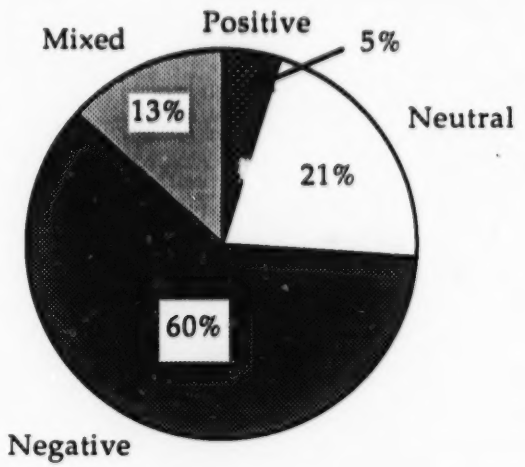
"I think that gays and lesbians shouldn't be allowed in the Army. I don't think that they should be allowed to teach, and the students if gay or a lesbian should keep it to themselves, and let it be known to only them, and not the rest of society." — Female, 15 years old

APPENDIX B — SURVEY OF COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SCHOOL GAY/STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

This survey was developed and conducted by the Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth (BAGLY) in cooperation with the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. The survey was developed to gauge what high school life is like for students who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This survey was distributed at seven community-based lesbian and gay youth groups and eight school-based gay/straight alliances across Massachusetts. It contained 33 questions; results of four of them are presented here. The 218 youth responding to the survey ranged in age from 13 to 23.

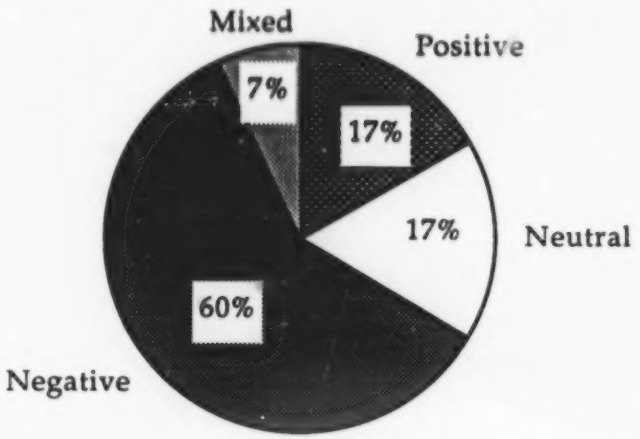
Community groups surveyed included BAGLY, the Brockton Regional Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth (BRAGLY), the Framingham Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth (FRAGLY), the North Shore Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth (NAGLY), Pioneer Valley Youth Group, the Supporters of Worcester Area Gay and Lesbian Youth (SWAGLY), and the Lowell Gay Youth Group. School-based groups were from Brookline High School, Cambridge Rindge & Latin High School, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, Newton South High School, Buckingham Browne & Nichols School, Concord Academy, Milton Academy, and Noble & Greenough School.

"How would most students in your high school react to finding out a student they knew was lesbian, gay, or bisexual?"

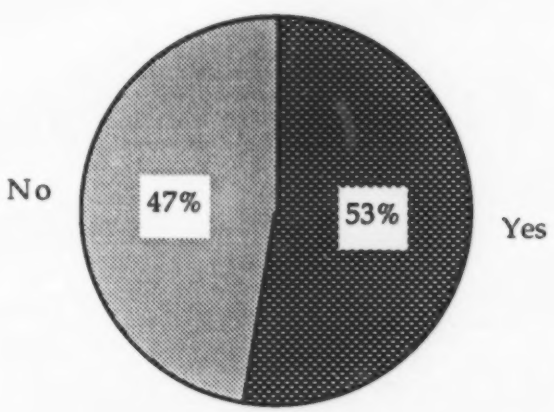


Note: Category totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of youth from community groups and school-based Gay/Straight Alliances, N=218

"How would the parents of most of your friends react to finding out that their child was lesbian, gay, or bisexual?"

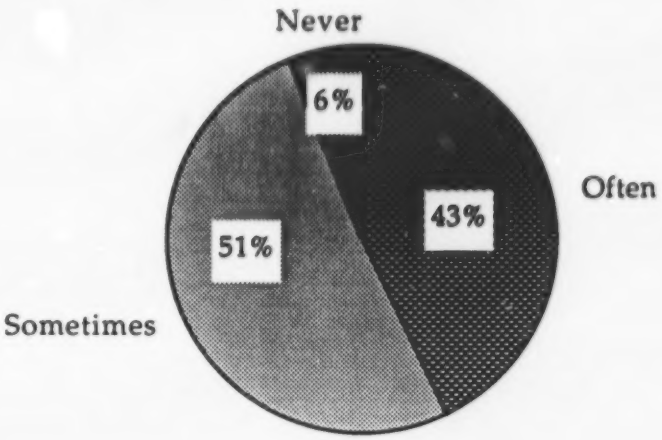


"Have you ever heard teachers in your high school make anti-lesbian or anti-gay remarks?"



Note: Category totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of youth from community groups and school-based Gay/Straight Alliances, N=218

"How often do you hear anti-gay or anti-lesbian remarks made at your high school?"



Note: Category totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey of youth from community groups and school-based Gay/Straight Alliances, N=218

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
STATE HOUSE • BOSTON 02133

WILLIAM F. WELD
GOVERNOR

ARGEO PAUL CELLUCCI
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

BY HIS EXCELLENCY

WILLIAM F. WELD
GOVERNOR

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 325

GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

WHEREAS, this Administration is committed to protecting the physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being of all young people in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in its 1989 "Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide", estimates that 30% of completed youth suicides annually are by gay and lesbian youth; and

WHEREAS, the same report states that suicide is the leading cause of death for gay and lesbian youth; and

WHEREAS, the 1989 Report estimates that 26% of young gays and lesbians are forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual identity and that gay and lesbian youth form a large component of the homeless youth population; and

WHEREAS, this Administration is committed to abolishing harassment, violence, and discrimination against young people because of their real or perceived sexual orientation; and

WHEREAS, Massachusetts has been and continues to be in the forefront of the national movement to end discrimination and prejudice directed at gays and lesbians; and

WHEREAS, many of the problems facing gay and lesbian youth are within the purview of state government and can be corrected by promulgation of information, training and the implementation and diffusion of formal guidelines and state policy; and

WHEREAS, the health of the Commonwealth is served by strengthening the physical and emotional health of both individuals and their families;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, William F. Weld, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Supreme Executive Magistrate, do hereby create the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth and order as follows:

1. The Commission shall consist of at least sixteen (16) members who shall serve without compensation. The Governor shall designate the chair of the Commission. The membership of the Commission shall include at least one parent of a gay or lesbian person; one high school student; one college student; one representative from an educational institution; and one representative of the mental health profession.

2. The Commission shall meet on a quarterly basis with the Secretary of Education, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Public Health Commissioner and the Secretary of Communities and Development or their designees and shall advise the Executive Office of Health and Human Services on an ongoing basis.

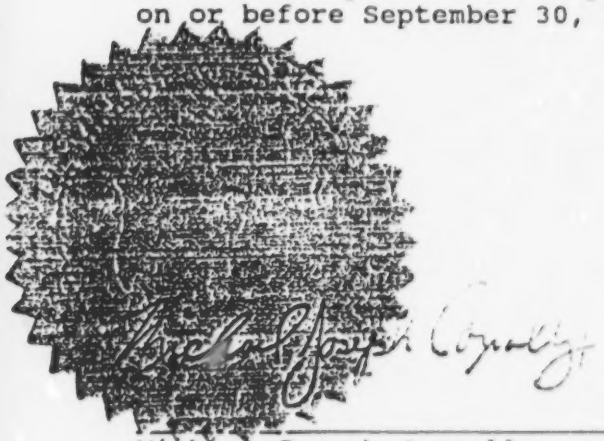
3. The Commission shall investigate the utilization of resources from both the public and private sectors to enhance and improve the ability of state agencies to provide services to gay and lesbian youth.

4. The Commission shall report to the Governor and make recommendations to the Governor relating to the concerns of gay and lesbian youth. The report shall be filed with the Governor on or before September 30, 1992.

Given at the Executive Chamber in Boston this 10th day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and ninety-two.

William F. Weld

William F. Weld, Governor
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Michael Joseph Connolly
Secretary of the Commonwealth

GOD SAVE THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

David LaFontaine, Canton: Chair
Alice Foley, Provincetown: Vice-Chair
Jessica Byers, Cambridge: Education Committee Co-Chair
Al Ferreira, Leominster: Education Committee Co-Chair
Doris Held, Cambridge: Education Committee Co-Chair
Kevin Jennings, Cambridge: Education Committee Co-Chair
Jerry Cheney, Worcester: Human Services Committee Co-Chair
Sterling Stowell, Cambridge: Human Services Committee Co-Chair

The Reverend Stewart Barns, Cambridge
Sharon Bergman, Amherst
Dean Bruno, Stoneham
Luann Conaty, Northborough
Bill Conley, Wilbraham
Harold Dufour-Anderson, Cambridge
Marshall Forstein, Jamaica Plain
Alexander Gray, Boston
Holly Gunner, Newton
Steve Johnson, Boston
Cynthia Lanane, Allston
Abner Mason, Boston
Enrique Maysonet, Worcester
Vincent McCarthy, Boston
Margaret O'Neill, Quincy
Dale Orlando, Lynn
Stephen Perreault, Cambridge
Michael Savage, Boston

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bell, A. and Weinberg, M., *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Centers for Disease Control, "Attempted Suicide Among High-School Students—United States, 1990" in *Health Objectives for the Nation*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Sept. 20, 1991, Vol. 40, No. 37, pp. 433-435.

Fifield, L., *On My Way to Nowhere: Alienated, Isolated, Drunk.* Los Angeles: Gay Common Services Center, 1975.

Finn, P. and McNeil, T., *The Response of the Criminal Justice System to Bias Crime: An Exploratory View*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1987.

Fisher, P. and Shaffer, D., "Facts about Suicide: A Review of National Mortality Statistics and Records" in *Planning to Live: Suicidal Youth in Community Settings*. Tulsa, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.

Gibson, Paul., "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide" in *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989.

Goff, J.L., "Sexual Confusion Among Certain College Males" in *Adolescence*, Vol. XXV, No. 99, Fall 1990.

Harbeck, Karen, *Coming Out of The Classroom Closet.: Gay and Lesbian Students,Teachers, and Curricula*. Binghamton, New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992.

Hendin, H., *Suicide in America*. Chapter 5, "Suicide and Homosexuality." New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1982.

Herek, Gregory, "Beyond 'Homophobia': A Social Psychological Perspective on Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men," in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1984.

Hetrick, E. S., and Martin, A. D., *Hetrick-Martin Institute Violence Report*. New York: The Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth, 1988.

Hunter, Joyce and Schaecher, Robert ," Stresses on Lesbian and Gay Adolescents in Schools" in *Social Work in Education*, Spring, 1987.

Hunter, Joyce, "Violence Against Lesbian and Gay Male Youths" in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 1990.

Jacobs, J., *Adolescent Suicide*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1971.

Jay, K. and Young, A., *The Gay Report: Lesbian and Gay Men Speak Out about Their Sexual Experiences and Lifestyles*. New York: Summit, 1977.

Kourany, R.F.C., "Suicide Among Homosexual Adolescents" in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Summer 1987.

Kruds, G., "Gay and Lesbian Homeless/Street Youth: Special Issues and Concerns." in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 1991.

Maltsberger, John T., *Suicide Risk: The Formulation of Clinical Judgement*. New York: New York University Press, 1986.

Martin, A.D., "Learning to Hide: The Socialization of the Gay Adolescent" in *Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 10, 1982.

McManus, Marilyn C., "Serving Gay and Lesbian Youth" in *Focal Point*. Spring/ Summer, 1991.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, *National Anti-Gay/Lesbian Victimization Report*. New York: 1984.

Remafedi, Gary, *Male Homosexuality: The Adolescent's Perspective*. Minneapolis: Adolescent Health Program, University of Minnesota, 1985.

Remafedi, F.J. and Deisher, R., "Risk Factors for Attempted Suicide in Gay and Bisexual Youth." *Pediatrics*, 1991.

Rich, C.L., Fowler, F.C., Young, D., and Blenkush, M., "San Diego Suicide Study: Comparison of Gay to Straight Males." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 1986.

Schneider, S., Farberow, N., and Kruks, G., "Suicidal Behavior in Adolescent and Young Adult Gay Men." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Winter 1989.

Sears, James, "Attitudes, Experiences, and Feelings of Guidance Counselors about Working with Homosexual Students." Document # 296210 of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1988.

Sears, James, "Personal Feelings and Professional Attitudes of Prospective Teachers Toward Homosexuality and Homosexual Students: Research Findings and Curriculum Recommendations." Document # 312222 of The American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1989.

Sears, James, *Growing Up Gay in the South: Race, Gender and Journeys of the Spirit.* New York: Haworth Press, 1991.

Sears, James, "Helping Students Understand And Accept Sexual Diversity" in *Educational Leadership.* September, 1991.

Shaffer, D., Garland, A., Gould, M., Fisher, P. and Trautman, P, "Preventing Teenage Suicide: A Critical Review" in *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry.* 27(6) , 1988.

Yates, G. L., MacKenzie, R. and Pennbridge, J. , "A Risk Profile Comparison of Runaway and Non-Runaway Youth" from *American Journal of Public Health,* 1988.